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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1866.

THE LONDON MUSICAL SEASON.

BY HENRY C. LUNN.

A RECAPITULATION of the events of the Musical Season for the present year, although justifying the assertion that the art is steadily progressing, will contain no record of any startling novelties; nor can it be said, in spite of the many laudatory notices that have appeared on living composers, that one name has been added to the list of those who have raised music to its present high position. If the duty of the critic were simply to record the amount of ovation bestowed upon art and artists, to count the *encores*, register the number of bouquets thrown nightly from the boxes, and calculate the duration and violence of the rounds of applause, his task would be simple; but he who would judge with a higher aim, has to look boldly into futurity, and to shut his eyes and ears to the fascinations which would lure him from the worship of the true art, to bend with the multitude before a popular idol. And yet how much is the public taste moulded by the fashion of the hour! Cruel indeed would be the man who would seek to revive the ghosts of departed criticisms to haunt their living authors! How many records of "great works," now forgotten, lie hidden in the dusty heaps of old journals? How many "wonderful performers" are there lauded to the skies, the names of whom even have not reached the ears of the present generation? Happy are those who are blessed with a short memory, or who do not file their newspapers; for their belief in the judgment of a critic who discovers a true genius can never be shaken by the fact that the same person has discovered so many before who have turned out to be false.

The promises of the two Italian Operas have been, as usual, partially redeemed. At Her Majesty's Theatre we have had two revivals which would make us pass over a multitude of shortcomings during the season—Gluck's *Iphigenia* and Mozart's *Seraglio*. Why a work so perfect in every department as Gluck's *Iphigenia* should not attract can astonish no one who watches an operatic audience, and marks how little—notwithstanding the many assertions to the contrary—they are moved by aught save the coarsest appeals to their sympathies. That the "sensation" school has entered largely into opera can scarcely be doubted, when we see that a large majority of the listeners, who have sat in a state of passive endurance through the best portions of an opera, are roused into enthusiasm by the Soldiers' Chorus, in *Faust*, or the "Morceau à l'Unisson," in *L'Africaine*. That there is a public for the highest forms of all art we freely admit; but if this intellectual section of the multitude will not fill the house, their classical taste can only be gratified now and then, as a "school treat" is occasionally given to charity-children. We remember an instance of a popular tragedian being driven off the stage by the attraction of a diminutive man who imitated a fly by walking on the ceiling. The actor complained; but the manager very properly threw off the responsibility by saying that if the public preferred the

"fly" to Shakspeare, he was extremely sorry for the reputation of the "immortal bard," but he should most certainly give them the "fly." And, considering that art is to take its place in the market with other commodities, who would blame him?

Foremost amongst the tenors at Her Majesty's Theatre we may rank Signor Mongini, who has been the reigning favourite of the season; his latter appearances, however, scarcely perhaps justifying the enthusiastic praise bestowed upon him on his *débüt*. Mr. Hohler, who made his first appearance in *I Puritani*, has a tenor voice of fine quality, but he has dwelt too long amongst flatterers to know his real place in the outer world of art; and we fear that it is now too late to retrieve his error. Amongst new comers, too, we must mention Madame de Meric Lablache, who made a highly favourable impression as *Azucena*, in *Il Trovatore*. Of those singers already well known to fame the lessee has made the utmost use during the session. Madlle. Titiens has proved herself fully capable of sustaining the highest place in all schools of music; her greatest triumphs, however, being in the greatest works. To Gluck's music—so full of colour, so expressive of the tenderest emotions, and yet so varied by impassioned bursts of declamation, taxing not only the vocal but the physical qualifications of the artist to the utmost—she lends a charm that arouses the most impassive listener into audible expressions of delight; and yet as the *Countess* in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, who could more exquisitely deliver the quiet and melodious music of Mozart; who could more eloquently reveal the patient suffering of the jealous but resigned wife of the libertine Count? Madlle. Ilma di Murska has added to her reputation by her performance of *Dinorah*, a part which appears admirably to suit her peculiarities; and Madame Harriers-Wipern has most satisfactorily maintained her position as a highly intellectual exponent of German music. Madame Trebelli-Bettini and Madlle. Bettelheim have been, as usual, invaluable members of the company; and to Madlle. Sinico, who advances every season in public estimation, the utmost praise must be awarded for the artistic care which she invariably bestows upon every part with which she is entrusted. We would willingly refrain from mentioning the return of Madame Grisi to the "scene of her former triumphs;" but a faithful record would be incomplete without a bare mention of the fact. For the sake of art, we are glad to say that the jury returned an unfavourable verdict without quitting their box. Dr. Gunz, Signori Gardoni, Bettini, Stagno and Tasca have shared the tenor music, with Signor Mongini and Mr. Hohler, during the season; and Herr Rokitansky and Mr. Santley, with Signori Marcello Junca, Gassier, Foli, and Bossi, have given a power and solidity to the bass and baritone department of the company to which the subscribers have been lately unaccustomed. Of the works successfully revived we have already spoken. Most of the stock operas have been most satisfactorily cast; and there has been little occasion to complain of want of variety. That Cherubini's *Medea* and Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* should have been specially reserved for the "extra nights," is a comment on the taste of the subscribers which we should wish to think undeserved.

At the Royal Italian Opera the great success of the season has been Madame Vilda, who, no doubt, had she appeared before us as early in life as Madlle.

Adelina Patti, would have held her place as firmly and as long as her predecessor, Madame Grisi. Madlle. Orgeni has also proved herself a good, if not a great, singer; but our old favourites have been the real attraction, both to the subscribers and the general public, Madlle. Adelina Patti and Madlle. Pauline Lucca charming more than ever by the grace and fascination of their acting as well as singing. The *Zerlina* of Madlle. Lucca has given a new life to Auber's ever fresh and welcome *Fra Diavolo*; and the same lady's performance of *Cherubino*, in Mozart's *Le Nozze* (most unaccountably produced on the last night but one of the season) is unquestionably one of the most attractive representations of the part ever witnessed. Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, already so well known in the concert-room, has fully established herself as a favourite at this establishment; her last performance, *Susannah*, in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, being one of her very best. Madlle. Artôt has been heard too little during the season; but whenever she has appeared her genuine artistic qualities have gained universal admiration. Her *Rosina*, in *Il Barbiere*, and the *Countess*, in *Le Nozze*, fully proved her right to take high rank in the best operas. Madlle. Fricci, too, one of the most painstaking of Mr. Gye's talented company, has been highly satisfactory in every part assigned to her during the season; and although we cannot confess to any great partiality for Madlle. Morensi, we are bound to say that she strove hard—perhaps a little too hard—to give effect to the parts of *Sebel*, in *Faust*, and the Page, in *Les Huguenots*. If Signor Mario could only understand what he can still sing, we should be pleased to welcome him as an artist whose finished style would almost compensate for his waning voice; but if he will attempt such parts as *Jean of Leyden*, he should be at once reminded that such impassioned music is now utterly beyond him. Signor Naudin (who has this year most successfully replaced Herr Wachtel as *Vasco di Gama*, in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*), with Signori Brignoli, Lucchesi, Neri Baraldi, and Fancelli, in more subordinate parts, complete the list of tenors; and M. Faure (still unapproachable as an actor and a singer), Signor Ronconi (whose individualities were excellently developed as the Cobbler, in *Crispino e la Comare*), Signori Ciampi, Graziani, Atti, Tagliafico, and Polonini, in the bass and baritone parts, gave enormous strength to the operas produced during the season. Madlle. Carlotta Patti was, we regret to hear, unable to fulfil her engagement, in consequence of ill health; but we are not aware that any reason was assigned for the non-appearance of Herr Schmid. To divine the policy of a management is a task scarcely perhaps worth attempting, or we should be strongly inclined to consider that the best has not been made of the company. We can no more say, for instance, why *Dinorah*, *La Gazza Ladra*, and *I Puritani* were not given—considering that the artists best suited for the respective parts were in the theatre—than we can understand why *Crispino e la Comare* (an opera—the result of the combined weakness of two brothers—) was given. The season, however, has been extremely attractive and varied; and if faults of omission are complained of, the lessee has himself to blame for issuing a prospectus containing promises not two-thirds of which he can himself hope to realize.

Confident as we are that orchestral concerts of

classical music must eventually hold a permanent place in the attractions of a London season, we cannot say that we see an indication that the absurd competition at present existing can continue; nor, indeed, for the healthy progress of the art, do we think it at all desirable. The Old Philharmonic, the New Philharmonic, and the Musical Society, can only exist as long as the original impetus given to each can be kept up. The *prestige* of the aristocratic Philharmonic Society is dying out—the New Philharmonic (professedly instituted as a powerful rival) started with a list of subscribers which it may take years to thin—and the Musical Society, consisting of professors and amateurs combined, contains the seeds of dissolution by its very constitution, the commencement of which may be seen by a glance at the recently formed infinitesimal committee for choosing the programmes; a point of such vital importance as to be only satisfactorily determined by the vote of all competent to judge. That in times past musical professors could agree is proved by the formation of the Old Philharmonic Society; and if it were possible that such unanimity could exist in the present day, we might hope to see—instead of three societies rivalling each other—one grand association for the presentation of the greatest orchestral works, which should include all the available talent in the metropolis.

The concerts of all these societies during the past season have however, on the whole, been highly satisfactory; and, were it not for the competitive principle which leads one to imitate the programme of another, the selection of compositions would have been extremely judicious. The rise of Schumann's music in public estimation is, we think, not altogether to be traced to its abstract merit. Schumann has been as much written down as Gounod has been written up; and the result has but proved the rule that over censure is as certain to defeat its object as over praise. If facts were necessary to prove our assertion, how is it that Schumann's music has been played and applauded at the most popular concerts, whilst the "Gounod nights"—although enriching the funds of an excellent Charity—have been obviously artistic failures?

The Monday Popular Concerts still continue their career of success, simply because they not only supplied a want, but created a new public for the enjoyment of classical chamber music; thus enabling the directors to engage the best talent, and to perform many works hitherto comparatively unknown. Were the pianoforte not so exclusively confined to a couple of artists, and the vocal music more carefully selected, these concerts would be unapproachable in excellence.

The gradual advance of the "Ballad Concert" has been a noteworthy feature of the past musical season. That these entertainments have been mainly fostered by music-sellers there can scarcely be a doubt; but we are sorry to see artists of the highest eminence letting themselves out for hire to further the spread of such utter inanities as we have been compelled to listen to at these concerts. That the "Royalty" system is lucrative alike to vocalists and publishers cannot be questioned; but the degradation to art and artists should have some little weight with those who live by the opinion of the public. Good voices and good singing may galvanize into something like life such puerilities as "The sparrow's chirp," or "My mother's arm-chair;" but the real question is

whether vocalists of established reputation would ever have travelled beyond the title pages of these effusions, had they not secured a positive interest in every copy sold. Apart from these modern manufactures, however, many of the really good songs by native composers have been resuscitated at these concerts; and although we cannot admit that Balfe's and Wallace's compositions can be classed under the head of "Old English Ballads," we are willing to allow that entertainments of this nature, with a judiciously selected programme, might do good, if only by reminding an audience that English composers have left us some music of purely home growth.

No record of a London musical season would be complete without a word of commendation on the excellent concerts periodically given at the Crystal Palace. Here the finest specimens of the art are preserved under a glass case; and light and air, without wet or dust, aid materially the intrinsic attraction of the music. No doubt eighteen out of twenty persons enjoy the "Opera Concerts," which now occupy the summer season; but we, who belong to the small minority, always secretly long for the time when Herr Manns shall again assemble his well-disciplined orchestra in the enclosed concert-room, and perform those great instrumental works which have raised the Crystal Palace band to so high a position in public estimation. The "Royalty" system, which we have already adverted to, no doubt acts detrimentally on the selection of vocal music at the winter concerts; but we are bound to say that the "Ballad" entertainments, given at the Crystal Palace during the last summer, have been far superior to those of a similar kind which have taken place in the metropolis.

Sacred music is every day claiming more of the public attention. Our advertising columns will show how many of our modern composers are actively engaged in enriching the stores of music for the service of the Church; and the Church Choir Festivals, now extending all over the kingdom, will prove what the establishment of carefully conducted choirs has already done towards the furtherance of the cause. The healthy development of this movement mainly depends upon its shaking itself free from the baneful effects of local interference. The more criticism is broadly invited, the more shall we believe that the best interests of Church music are solely the object in view; and, much as the past season has shown how widely spread is the wish to promote these periodical gatherings, we hope that the coming year will still more prove that all actively engaged in them have been prompted to waive their individual feelings and interests by the earnest desire for satisfactory and continuous progress.

We must not omit to mention that important evidence has been lately given respecting musical education in England, before the Society of Arts; and the result has been a movement towards placing the Royal Academy of Music on a surer and safer basis than has hitherto existed. The Report of the Society of Arts on this subject has been forwarded to us; and we hope to be able shortly to give the matter our earnest attention. Meanwhile we trust that in reforming the Royal Academy of Music, it may be borne in mind that it is essentially an Institution for the training of those intended for the profession. A select number of earnest and tried

teachers, therefore, who will attach themselves permanently to the Academy, will be more satisfactory to the public than a list of Professors who, in consideration of giving their names, will only occasionally give their services. That Professor Sterndale Bennett is appointed Principal of the new Academy, and Herr Otto Goldschmidt Vice-Principal, may be accepted as a sufficient guarantee that the musical arrangements will be entrusted to the judgment of mature artists.

In spite of the continued success and universal appreciation of the standard operatic, orchestral, and sacred works, it will be seen, as we have before said, that although the musical season just concluded has been a busy one, there is little positive progress to record. The Sacred Harmonic Society has fully maintained its high character for the performance of the best sacred compositions in the best possible style; but here, as in most other musical institutions, the report of one year is, with few exceptions, but the echo of the previous one. There is much sacred, as well as secular, music waiting for a hearing; and the value of works which have so long been stamped with universal approval, can in no way be damaged by the occasional trial of those which, by the consent of all competent musicians, have a right to be submitted to public judgment.

MR. ALFRED MELLON'S Promenade Concerts have been the chief attraction during the past month. Madlle. Maria Krebs has again been delighting everybody by her artistic pianoforte playing, and appears to have established herself as a great favourite at these performances. Mr. Mellon's orchestra is, as usual, excellent; and he infuses a sufficient quantity of classical music into his selections to attract all classes of listeners. He has given a "Gounod night," a "Mendelssohn night," a "Weber night," &c., all of which have been highly appreciated; but the meaning of a "Volunteer night," which he also announces, is utterly beyond our comprehension. His vocalists have been very successful, especially Madlle. Liebhart, whose voice and style are admirably suited for this class of entertainment.

THE "Hall by the Sea," at Margate, bears no outward sign that music forms a prominent feature of the entertainment provided therein; for Spiers and Pond, who are the proprietors, and supply the refreshments, have their names so prominently placed in front that a passer-by might reasonably imagine it to be a Hall attached to the railway-station, where dinners, teas and suppers are provided "on the shortest notice." Insignificant little bills, however, announce that a concert takes place every evening; and, tempted by this information, we lately strolled in, and found a very elegantly fitted-up room, and a small, but efficient, orchestra conducted by Julien. During the evening bits of great works, such as the Menuetto and Trio from Mozart's "Jupiter Symphony" and the Allegro and Storm from Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony," were performed by the band, so as to give a classical flavor to the concert; and Mr. Adolphus Lockwood, on the harp, and Mr. Rogers, on the trombone, played so well as to be overwhelmed by applause. Miss Rose Hersee, a very agreeable soprano, condescended to employ her vocal powers upon a song called "Coo, says the gentle Dove," the music of which was as simple as the title; but it brought in the stragglers from the refreshment department (who were discussing Spiers and Pond's "Ambrosial punch") and the applause she received will no doubt encourage her to persevere in this unpretending school of art. Mr. Farquharson, a ponderous bass, sang a song which was entered in the programme "Impromptu," but which we think would be claimed by Mr. Balfe as a ballad called "When I beheld the anchor weighed," from his opera *The Siege of Rochelle*. After the concert a boy (whom we should have concluded to be unmistakably British, had not his name been "El Nino Eddie") gave a very clever performance on the tight-rope; and then came the "Bal d'Été," the music to which was spiritedly played and conducted by Julien. We are bound to say that all the arrangements connected with this establishment appear extremely well managed; and have no doubt that the "Hall by the sea" will prove a perfect success if the intrusion of the "mild cigar" can only be successfully resisted. We shall be pleased also to find that the programmes are selected with greater care, and that the exterior of the building is made less to resemble the refreshment department at a railway-station.

ON the evening of the 21st ult., a selection of sacred music, from the works of Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Rossini, &c., was given in the Commercial Road Chapel. The vocalists were Miss Jenkinson, Miss Webber, Mr. Harvey Smith, Mr. W. Stock, Mr. W. H. Toynbee, Mr. Edwin Potter, and Mr. A. J. Hubbard. Organists, Mr. Edwin Potter and